

**Testimony in support of SB 929, An Act Expanding School Meal Programs to Provide Free School Meals to All Students, February 7, 2023**

Senator Maher, Representative Linehan and members of the Committee on Children, my name is Karen Edwards. I live in Stamford. I am professor of Public Health and Adjunct Associate Professor of Pediatrics. I am a parent and a retired pediatrician/ public health professional. **I am testifying in strong support of SB 929 An Act Expanding School Meal Programs to Provide Free School Meals to All Students.**

In my family, my generation has never experienced being hungry, but as recently as my parents' generation, my family depended on government and community assistance to stave off hunger and we are forever grateful for that.

The short and long-term academic and health benefits of Free School Meals for All Students is well supported by the evidence which has been summarized recently by the *Brookings Institute* (<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2021/02/11/schoolwide-free-meal-programs-fuel-better-classroom-outcomes-for-students/>). Aside from the immediate priceless benefits to children who would no longer be hungry and would do better in school, free school meals benefit schools by decreasing the costs of administering the free and reduced-cost meal program and benefit the state by increasing the academic readiness of tomorrow's Connecticut workforce and by increasing purchase of food for school meals from CT businesses and farms. Honestly, though, from my viewpoint, it would be benefit enough just to keep the 130,000 food-insecure CT children from experiencing hunger.

Most who read this testimony have probably never experienced being hungry. They don't know how badly it makes children feel and how it decreases concentration and the ability to learn and keep up with academic requirements. Let's make sure that Connecticut children do not experience the pain of hunger or hunger's other negative short-term and long-term consequences. Let's also be sure not to speak ill of or blame parents who struggle to provide enough food to keep their children from being hungry. About half of households that cannot provide enough food for their children include at least one working adult. I can't imagine how a parent must feel when they cannot keep their children from being hungry, but I CAN imagine the relief they feel at knowing their children will be fed in school.

Preventing children from experiencing acute hunger now and increasing academic achievement and life success for children as they grow into adulthood is an important role for state government.

**I strongly support SB 929 An Act Expanding School Meal Programs to Provide Free School Meals to All Students.**

Thank you,

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